Summary of Major Themes from 1/25/10 SRP Strategic Planning Information Session

The following is a summary of the major points raised during the information session:

Questions 1 & 2. What scientific themes and issues are the most important to address in the SF Research Program and why?

What prioritization criteria should SRP use to guide inclusion of themes and issues in program activities?

What are the key teams and disciplines needed for the SRP to make the greatest advances in scientific themes and issues most important to the Program?

Priority can also be driven by identifying and addressing key areas of scientific uncertainty (e.g. dioxin hazard and detection levels, Vapor intrusion modeling, methods for accurately estimating bioavailability of contaminants in sediment and soil, determining what exposure risks there may be on sites slated for revitalization, etc.). This also extends to reducing uncertainty in areas where there is currently not a lot of attention being paid: EDCs, consumer products. In such cases, NIEHS/SRP may be the only ones doing this kind of research.

Ecotoxicity was another area of interest to OSRTI, particularly among the eco assessors, but that has bearing on bioavailability and human health concerns also.

Another commenter noted that future technological advances in hazardous waste assessment and remediation may primarily just be enhancements to the major technological advancements that have been made of the past couple decades

NCEA is congressionally mandated to post chemicals being put forward under their nomination process. This could be added to the RFA, or another guide/indication of what researchers should focus on.
In terms of old vs. new (emerging) contaminants, the comment was made that a tremendous amount of data gaps exist for standard NPL-listed compounds (e.g. dioxin) and therefore still require basic research to address these issues. Scientists naturally want to pursue the up-and-coming emerging threats; however, research on the old

contaminants is still needed. As an example, dioxin bioavailability from soil still unknown – and thought that no one is doing research on this.

The SRP must prioritize based on its overarching goal – if that is to improve decision making at sites today (or in five years) that will drive priorities in a different way than if the program decides its goal is to conduct a research program

Question 3. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the SRP, is the current biomedical/non-biomedical framework the most effective approach? Why or why not?

One OSRTI manager proposed that SRP try presenting its research results in a "problem oriented approach" to serve communities and field people, rather than on a research topic approach. This approach may help those not in the research environment who aren't sure what scientific disciplines, universities, or research areas they need to search, but can only identify what the problem is that they're trying to resolve.

Critical interdisciplinary research needs were identified: in order to understand how to address/mitigate the health effects of PCBs, ecologists must be a part of the research team; in order to advance new dioxin soil assessment tests, chemists must pair with engineers, who can ensure the new system can be field-ready.

Enhancing information technology into existing research programs is very important for interpretation and visualization of data. This can be critical to get the data in a form useful for helping with decision-making.

"Postdoctoral training is an excellent time for someone to come into a laboratory with a different expertise than what is represented in the lab – building on new concepts. This could be encouraged if funding were available that specifies bringing in a postdoc to broaden the capabilities of a particular research group."

Question 4. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the SRP, what approaches to training are most appropriate for the SRP to meet its research mandates?

There was interest expressed in having SRP graduate students intern with OSRTI on specific projects to help both OSRTI on those tasks and SRP graduates gain a better understanding of the OSRTI science and policy issues, opportunities/limitations, and overall processes. EPA has some formal EPA-University arrangements, like NEMS. SRP may look into that as a model.

Training in how to effectively achieve research translation may be a valuable experience for trainees.

Remedial Project Managers are located throughout the US. Inviting RPMs to come and talk to trainees would be another way for students to learn more about the realities of site management.

Question 5. Who are or should be SRP's stakeholders?

How can SRP most effectively receive input from them?

It would help stakeholders, in general, if SRP would come out with "position papers" that draw conclusions based on science conducted by the program.

Suggested that expanding the use of CLU-IN by SRP would help reach more stakeholders and/or disseminate SRP products more effectively.

Collectively (SRP and OSWER) could strive to make better connections between site owners/federal facility managers for field-ready research or testing. This would expedite the technology transfer process.

Comment was made that Remedial Project Managers are an important stakeholder. A&E firms also play a critical role in site assessment, use of new technologies for remediation, etc. Involving them may provide a good link to RPMs as well, as the A&E firms give EPA suggestions regarding issues of management of sites.

Question 6. What are the best ways for SRP to achieve its goals of research translation that is, making research more accessible by end-users?

What data sharing tools or procedures should SRP use?

There is a need for more research translation that would require both OSRTI and SRP working together to enhance its effectiveness.

It was suggested that SRP emphasize working directly with the EPA lead regions for SF and Science to promote ongoing relationships with the field offices. Suggestion made that research translation core focus on ORD may not be the best approach.

OSRTI management was very interested in setting up a series of meetings or a routine process to collaboratively review SRP research projects to identify those that are ready for application and match them up with appropriate sites for application.

OSRT noted that it might be effective if they were to put notices out on website (internal or otherwise) that allows researchers to know which sites are open to partnering with researchers. This would help "feed the front end" of the translation process.

OSRTI is working on a remediation/monitoring technology matrix to document use of new technologies for particular types of contaminants in particular media. Technologies from contracts/grants within ETV, EPA, and SBIR will be included. SRP could be included as well.

Having the grantee-submitted abstract on the SRP website would be helpful mechanism for research translation.

All materials that feature a project or activities (handouts/flyers) need to have PI contact information readily available for, e.g. an RPM to directly contact the person doing the SRP research.

Many SRP research titles are more "technology-focused" than "problem-focused." For materials advertising research of the program, it will be better-received by RPMs with a title like "lead in soils" than "XRF technology…" or "how is TCE getting in groundwater?" instead of "passive samplers…".

Question 7. What are the most appropriate approaches to community outreach for SRP?

Community engagement is a big initiative for OSWER. Academic researchers tend to have a great deal of credibility amongst community members; hence, having researchers present at community meetings – to share "unbiased" scientific expertise - would be very useful for the community and site managers.

Question 8. What research team structure(s) and/or disciplines are needed to make the greatest advances in SRP Program mandates?

There was a concern raised regarding why SRP didn't require that the multi-project grantees demonstrate how their multiple projects were integrated to meet the research objectives of the SRP. Others also indicated that they would appreciate learning the research themes of each university program and how the existing programs cores are integrated at the university level.